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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Annual report of the United Nations Children's Fund to the Economic and Social Council

Addendum

UNICEF follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development

SUMMARY

Chapter I outlines the key elements of the Social Summit most relevant to UNICEF. Chapter II provides a general view to UNICEF assistance in the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Director has previously provided the Executive Board with updates on UNICEF support to the preparatory process for the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD), including the report on UNICEF and WSSD (E/ICEF/1994/L.8) submitted to the Executive Board at its 1994 annual session. The present document was prepared in response to Executive Board decision 1994/R.3/9 (E/ICEF/1994/13), in which the Executive Board decided to include an agenda item on follow-up to WSSD, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, from 6 to 12 March 1995, for discussion at the present session.

2. At the time of writing, the Secretary-General is in the process of reviewing arrangements within the United Nations system for follow-up to the Social Summit. A meeting of senior officials on the subject is planned for early June 1995, during which conclusions are likely to be reached on organizing work and assigning responsibilities. In addition, during the coordination segment of its annual session starting in late June 1995, the Economic and Social Council will be reviewing coordinated arrangements for follow-up to the results of major international conferences.

3. As decisions unfold regarding structures and responsibilities, the Executive Board will be provided with additional information and specific proposals for UNICEF participation in the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the Social Summit (A/CONF.166/L.3).

I. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT MOST RELEVANT TO UNICEF

4. United Nations conferences often make their most important impact by changing concepts and approaches. WSSD was the first international effort after the cold war to address the full range of issues related to meeting basic human needs. Therefore, the Social Summit offered the unique opportunity to bring together the "social services" and "income" sides of poverty issues. While the United Nations system has many consensus goals for the "social services" side of poverty issues (e.g., the goals of the World Summit for Children and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)), there is still the need to forge a more specific consensus around income-related issues (e.g., access to credit for small farmers, income-generating opportunities for women and support to the informal sector). The WSSD process can help to better define objectives for the income-related issues and then help to ensure that the income and social services dimensions are brought together in a mutually supportive anti-poverty package.

5. In addition to their ultimate contribution to development priorities, the WSSD Declaration and Programme of Action also contain a number of important elements directly relevant to the work of UNICEF.

6. First, commitment 6 of the Declaration states, "We commit ourselves to promoting and attaining the goals of universal and equitable access to quality education, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the access of all to primary health care ..." (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.2, paragraph 2). The Declaration goes on to commit Governments to "formulate and strengthen timebound national strategies for the eradication of illiteracy and universalization of basic education, which includes early childhood education, primary education ..." (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.2, paragraph 2 (a)). It then states Government commitment to "ensure that children, particularly girls, enjoy their rights and promote the exercise of those rights by making education, adequate nutrition and health care accessible to them, consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and recognizing the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and other persons legally responsible for children" (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.2, paragraph 2 (c)).

7. The Declaration goes on to state that Governments will "seek to attain maternal and child health objectives, especially the objectives of reducing child and maternal mortality of the 1990 World Summit for Children, the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development" (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.2), paragraph 2 (p)).

8. The above-mentioned commitments from the Declaration are dealt with at greater length in the Programme of Action (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.3-7). In particular, the goals of the World Summit for Children and of ICPD are given strong support. There was special endorsement of the goals for universal access to basic education and primary education (paragraph 36 (a)); reduction of mortality rates for infants and children under five years of age (paragraph 36 (c)); a reduction in maternal mortality (paragraph 36 (d)); a reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition in children under five years of age (paragraph 36 (f)), as well as access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation for all (paragraph 36 (l)) (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.4).

9. In addition to the issues of health, education, nutrition and water and sanitation, the Declaration and Programme of Action also contain a number of other important provisions directly related to children. For example, the Declaration expresses strong support for meeting the needs of the girl child (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.1, commitment 5, paragraph (f)). It also contains a major commitment to accelerating economic, social and human resource development in Africa and the least developed countries (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.1, commitment 7), as well as a strong commitment to ensuring that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.1, commitment 8). Likewise, in the Programme of Action, there is strong support for promoting and protecting the rights of the child, particularly the girl child, and encouraging ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Programme of Action also includes support for improving the situation of children in especially difficult circumstances and preventing exploitative child labour.

10. In addition to the provisions related to children, the chapter on the eradication of poverty calls for efforts to develop national eradication plans, giving special attention to improving access to productive resources and infrastructure (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.4). For example, for rural poverty, measures such as land reform, improved land tenure security, improved access to water, credit, extension services and access to market are encouraged. For urban poverty, measures such as promoting small-scale entrepreneurs, infrastructure investment and special measures for the homeless are encouraged. In many of these areas, particular attention to the needs of women is emphasized.

11. Beyond the provisions on substantive development issues, there are also important provisions on financing the objectives and on the implementation process. For example, in the chapter on implementation and follow-up, the section on mobilization of financial resources states that the implementation of WSSD will require "agreeing on a mutual commitment between interested developed and developing country partners to allocate, on average, 20 per cent of ODA [official development assistance] and 20 per cent of the national budget, respectively, to basic social programmes" (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.7, paragraph 88 (c)).

12. Support for the 20/20 initiative may well come to represent an historic breakthrougn – it is the first time that the international community has undertaken to support a floor of financial assistance aimed at basic social services. It also is accompanied by important provisions in support of the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product to be devoted to ODA, as well as new support for debt relief efforts. In short, the financing provisions represent a well-balanced effort to increase support for ODA as well as to strengthen and reprioritize support to the social sectors.

13. In terms of implementation, the Programme of Action calls for the formulation of national strategies, evaluations and reviews that, inter alia, include time-bound goals and targets for reducing poverty and eradicating extreme poverty. There are also provisions for the strong participation of civil society, including community organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). At the international level, the Programme of Action supports a comprehensive approach to the implementation of the objectives of recent United Nations conferences and gives special attention to the role of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for intergovernmental action. Within the United Nations system, all relevant organizations are invited to take the conclusions of the Social Summit into account in their "activities, programmes and medium-term strategies". In addition, "Relevant governing bodies should review their policies, programmes, budgets and activities in this regard" (A/CONF.166/L.3/Add.7, paragraph 96 (b)). The Secretary-General is requested to ensure effective coordination of the implementation process, and coordination at the country level should make use of the resident coordinator system.

II. THE NEXT STEPS

14. As mentioned in paragraph 2 above, the Secretary-General will begin the implementation process at the inter-agency level with a meeting of the senior officials in early June 1995. The Economic and Social Council also will have the opportunity to discuss the overall implementation process for United Nations conferences in late June. The Executive Director has begun discussions with the organization's United Nations partners in preparation for these processes, although at the time of writing (less than one month after WSSD), those discussions are still in a very preliminary phase. The Executive Board will be provided with an oral update at the present session.

15. The provisions of WSSD related to support for implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children represent an important opportunity for UNICEF to help strengthen ongoing governmental, inter-agency and NGO processes now well under way. UNICEF also can look forward to similar support from the WSSD process for the goals of ICPD and other related conferences. Likewise, support for issues such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, improving the situation of children in especially difficult circumstances and preventing exploitative child labour is extremely important.

16. However, perhaps the most important opportunity offered by the Social Summit for the above-mentioned issues is the opportunity to see them placed in a broader context, where they can be linked to other related issues. For example, the health, education, nutrition and related efforts under way can now be linked to efforts to address the "income" side of poverty issues in order to create a more comprehensive and mutually strengthening anti-poverty "package" for action at national, regional and international levels.

17. In summary:

(a) The Executive Director is committed to ensuring that UNICEF plays an active and supportive role in the overall United Nations system follow-up process. Clearly, field-level action needs to be a special area of focus;

(b) As proposed by the Secretary-General, the WSSD processes should be seen as part of a continuum that relates closely to the implementation processes under way for the World Summit for Children, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, ICPD, etc.;

(c) For UNICEF, this continuum offers opportunities to help strengthen and accelerate the implementation process under way for the World Summit for Children goals. The work of UNICEF in the implementation of the goals and commitments of the World Summit for Children thus forms a direct part of the implementation of the commitments of WSSD. In addition, the broad agenda of WSSD follow-up can help to mobilize a wide range of action on poverty reduction, within which progress for children can be placed. Through its inter-agency participation and advocacy, UNICEF can help to link the previously approved goals for basic services to the new goals related to the income side of poverty. WSSD also offers an especially unique opportunity to create an overall "anti-poverty initiative";

(d) The Executive Board will receive regular updates and will be consulted on UNICEF involvement in the follow-up process.